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ABSTRACT

This bulletin focuses on the benefits of engaging employers in school-to-work systems. It begins with a rationale for convincing employers that they must play a more active role in partnerships with schools and communities. The next section highlights strategies that school-to-work practitioners have successfully used to build employer involvement in school-to-work systems. The strategies include the following: articulate the benefits of school-to-work to employers; build a national leadership and support structure; provide a range of opportunities for involvement; target key employers and industries; foster employer ownership; address employers' concerns about liability issues; and build local networks of employers. Three examples of effective practices are then provided: the Kalamazoo Valley (Michigan) Consortium Education for Employment Program; the Monroe County (New York) Educational Outcomes Project in which Eastman Kodak has been working with the county to develop work-based educational outcomes for the school-to-work initiative; and the Maryland school-to-work employer incentive fund. Contacts and addresses for these effective practices are provided. The bulletin concludes with a listing of seven organizations that can provide further information on the topic. Brief summaries describe the organizations' focus and activities. Eleven resource publications are also listed. (YLB)

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★RESOURCE BULLETIN

JUNE 1996

Engaging Employers in School-to-Work Systems

Today's youth are faced with an increasingly complex and rapidly changing economy. In order to help prepare them to succeed in this context and engage in a life of productive, satisfying work and lifelong learning, the School-to-Work Opportunities Act was signed into law by President Clinton in 1994. School-to-work is a comprehensive school- and work-based education reform mechanism that can provide all students with the knowledge and skills necessary for future education and employment. To ensure the successful development of school-to-work systems, employers must play a more active role in partnerships with schools and communities.

When a school-to-work practitioner sets out to recruit employers, appealing to two overarching motives--philanthropy and competition--can greatly enhance the chances of successfully engaging an employer. The appeal of working with youth and participating in the community drives many businesses to provide students with work-based learning experiences, or become involved in school-to-work in other ways. In a recent survey of employer participation in school-to-work, the Institute for Educational Leadership found that over 75% of employers, particularly those from large establishments, agreed that they were motivated by an interest in performing a community service.

But an appeal solely to an employer's sense of civic duty will not, on its own, produce a nationwide school-to-work system that provides work-based learning opportunities for all students. A critical supplement to engagement efforts focusing on an employer's sense of civic duty lies in demonstrating the economic benefits of participation in school-to-work to employers. The American economy is changing in response to heightened international competition and the development of new technologies. Increasingly, the success of a firm depends on the knowledge, skills, and abilities of its workers, necessitating a better link between education and work. John Tobin at Siemens Corporation, a leading international manufacturing firm, remarks that Siemens' involvement in school-to-work is driven by the direct link between education and training, productivity, and the corporation's bottom line. Siemens has demonstrated that its productivity tends to increase with education and training initiatives, and has concluded that the return on investment in school-to-work is well worthwhile.

A recent survey of employer attitudes toward school-to-work by the National Center on the Educational Quality of the Workforce echoes Tobin's comments. The report states that what often drives the competitiveness of firms is their capacity to make investments in the human capital of their current and potential employees. Innovation and productivity, the keys to a firm's competitiveness, are

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functions of the education of the employees, and, in particular, their ability to plan, reason, communicate, collaborate, and solve problems. These are precisely the skills and abilities that school-to-work systems help to develop in American students.

The School-to-Work Opportunities Act seeks to develop these skills and abilities by providing a clear framework for building school-to-work partnerships. A crucial element of building employer involvement in school-to-work partnerships involves convincing firms that the skills and abilities of students--their potential employees--are of critical importance in competing in the global economy. The remaining sections of this bulletin highlight strategies that school-to-work practitioners across the country have successfully utilized to build employer involvement in school-to-work systems.

Strategies for Recruiting Employers

Articulate the benefits of school-to-work to employers. School-to-work initiatives can offer many benefits to employers, including:

Reducing the costs of recruiting, screening, selecting, and training new workers. Schools are the principal supplier of employees for many businesses. When employers work collaboratively with schools, they can reduce their costs. School-to-work systems help employers avoid having to rely on uncertain information and costly methods of recruitment and selection. Employers can obtain evidence of a potential employee's skills and abilities through work-based learning programs, skill certificates, or portfolios of student work. In addition, if employers in school-to-work systems hire students from their own structured work-based learning initiatives, they reduce training costs. There is also evidence that school-to-work can reduce turnover costs for employers.

Improving the performance of existing employees, particularly worksite supervisors and mentors. The process of developing work-based learning experiences for students can lead worksite supervisors to examine their own activities in the workplace. In the process of determining key workplace learning elements and processes for students, employees may find ways to improve their own performance. Individuals in the workplace who work with students also have an opportunity to develop managerial and supervisory skills.

Meeting the demand for new skills required by rapid technological change. Many students currently in high school have considerable computer and technology skills because they have grown up working with computers and high-tech electronics. In many instances, they can share this knowledge and experience with current workers.

Improving community relations. Community involvement is good business practice. Not only do employers receive the satisfaction of interacting with young people and contributing to their educational development in school-to-work initiatives, but they also benefit from an improved local education system and a positive image projected throughout the community.

Build a national leadership and support structure. Visible leadership and support from the nation's top government officials, educators, labor representatives, and, in particular, businesspeople can

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champion school-to-work, placing it firmly on the agenda of the nation's employers. The National Employer Leadership Council (NELC) is one example of a national organization committed to building a school-to-work system. The NELC is a group of business executives who are working to improve the nation's workforce development process and, ultimately, the competitiveness of American business, through school-to-work systems. The NELC is working on several major initiatives, including developing marketing and publicity materials to expand the number of work-based learning opportunities for students, designing a school-to-work business awards program to reward exemplary employers, providing technical assistance, and developing teacher externship programs. Other business-led national organizations, such as the National Alliance of Business and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, have been actively involved in building school-to-work systems and are a good source of information and technical assistance for employers.

In addition to the support of business-led organizations, leadership from organized labor can greatly enhance employer engagement efforts. Any reform effort that can improve management-employee relations will be aided by the participation and support of labor organizations. To assist in the development of school-to-work systems, the AFL-CIO Human Resource Development Institute and the American Federation of Teachers are working to identify effective practices and collaborative union-employer school-to-work partnerships.

Provide a range of opportunities for involvement. Employers consistently report that a wide range of well-defined roles and responsibilities encourage participation. Successful school-to-work systems do not attempt to channel employers into prescribed activities. Instead, they offer employers a continuum of choices, ranging from career awareness, career exploration, and job shadowing, to more intensive activities such as mentoring, apprenticeships, and other structured work-based learning opportunities. Employers can also provide input in the development of integrated curriculum, develop and recognize skill standards, serve on planning and governance bodies, and recruit other employers. The intensity and nature of employer involvement in these activities depend upon the specific resources available in local labor markets and the goals of both the employer and the school-to-work system.

Target key employers and industries. Local school-to-work partnerships can begin to build employer involvement by targeting businesses and industries in high growth areas, and those that have prior involvement in business and education partnerships or other community-based activities. Other factors that may help in targeting employer recruitment efforts include the extent to which the employers have a record of hiring young people, skill shortages among entry-level workers, cooperative labor-management relations, or a commitment to employee training and diversity. While all area employers should be addressed in a recruitment effort, targeting the industry sectors and types of firms most likely to participate is an effective way to initiate a recruitment strategy. The visible engagement of these employers can serve as a springboard for expanding school-to-work among other employers.

Foster employer ownership. Employer participation on advisory boards and in developing skill standards, curriculum, and assessment tools provides businesses with a sense of "ownership" of a school-to-work system. The National Alliance of Business explains that school-to-work initiatives provide employers an opportunity to help shape education systems and the preparation of young people for productive futures. Through school-to-work systems, employers can help to identify growth industries and the skills required to fill jobs in them, articulate an education reform agenda that reflects current and future workforce needs,

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and advocate policies that ensure global competitiveness. Business involvement in school-to-work ensures that programs are responsive to industry needs, that skill standards are current with high performance workplaces and technology, and that students are able to find jobs in their chosen fields.

Address employers' concerns about liability issues. A number of business partners have raised questions regarding child labor laws and the Fair Labor Standards Act. To address these concerns, the National School-to-Work Office has released *School-to-Work Opportunities and the Fair Labor Standards Act,* a guide to work-based learning, federal child labor laws, and minimum wage provisions. In addition, many local school-to-work initiatives use intermediary organizations as the "employers of record" for students, absorbing liability and administrative costs associated with work-based learning experiences.

Build local networks of employers. Developing networks among schools, community organizations, labor, and employers is critical to the success of school-to-work systems. The following are some of the networks that may be used as starting points for expanding school-to-work partnerships:

Participating firms. Employers emphasize that they respond more readily to other employers than they do to government officials or educators. Encouraging CEOs or high-level managers to champion school-to-work, both within their own company and with other employers in the community, is a key element of strategies to build employer involvement. Practitioners can promote employer networking by encouraging participation on advisory boards, arranging presentations, and providing employers with school-to-work materials for distribution.

Intermediary organizations. Employer-based intermediary organizations, such as industry associations, chambers of commerce, and professional associations, can provide access to large numbers of employers. Intermediary organizations also provide a common pool of resources and services that individual employers--small businesses in particular--may need in order to participate in school-to-work initiatives. Intermediary organizations may focus specifically on school-to-work, or they may be local counterparts of national organizations like local chambers of commerce or trade associations. Organizations such as employment service and vocational rehabilitation agencies have a great deal of experience connecting job seekers with employers. Organizations with good track records of working with employers are most likely to be effective, because they have established credibility as well as mutual respect and avenues of communication.

School-to-work coordinators and employment specialists. A number of local school-to-work systems use employment specialists to recruit employers and have found them particularly effective in building employer involvement. Experience suggests that an individual acting as a liaison between schools and employers can build collaborative relationships and develop an understanding of the special needs and concerns of employers. By devoting time and resources specifically to recruiting employers, employment specialists can target employers who otherwise might have been overlooked.

Students, parents, and school staff. Existing formal and informal relationships can provide the foundation for building a school-to-work system. The personal relationships and contacts of students, parents, and school staff are an effective means to build a sense of partnership and common goals throughout the community.

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Effective Practices

The **Kalamazoo Valley Consortium Education for Employment Program (EFE)** is a county-wide school-to-work system in Michigan that uses a number of strategies to build business-education partnerships. At the beginning of their efforts, EFE organized an Education for Employment Outcomes Task Force to identify the workplace know-how skills expected by employers in the local labor market. The Task Force allowed employers, educators, and intermediary organizations to meet and discuss their needs and expectations regarding the school-to-work transition system for the community's youth.

The system continually engages representatives from business and industry through EFE advisory committees, which are organized around occupational areas. The committees meet at least twice during the school year, helping to develop a wide range of work-based learning opportunities. Local corporations, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies have worked with EFE to develop work-based learning programs, offering students formal classwork in worksite settings. The partners work together to develop curricula and on-the-job training experiences, and the business provides classroom space. Business partners also offer paid work experiences in students' occupational areas of interest, and some formal apprenticeships. Several businesses also offer business/industry worksite training to students interested either in occupational areas that do not have sufficient student interest to fill a class or in occupational areas that are not traditionally taught at the high school level.

Employers in Kalamazoo point to several key factors that have contributed to the success of EFE business partnerships: logistical support provided by EFE staff; mutual respect between representatives from business and educators; personal commitment to EFE by businesses in time and resources; the willingness of EFE staff to grant business-led advisory committees a substantial leadership role; the hiring of instructors and school-to-work coordinators with relevant business background; and a network among EFE administrators and business leaders.

Eastman Kodak has been working with Monroe County in New York to develop work-based educational outcomes for the school-to-work initiative. The Monroe County Educational Outcomes Project was launched as a county-wide effort to identify the knowledge and skills students will need to succeed in the future. More than 300 stakeholders including educators, union members, parents, students, local college staff, and employers worked together to discuss these issues. The result of these meetings was the successful identification of the skills needed from students, a greater sense of partnership and community among the stakeholders, and a publication, *Preparing Our Youth for the Future: Success Through Skill, Knowledge, and Attitude.* The publication is a tool for local partnerships who want to work to establish and implement similar standards for their students.

The **Maryland** school-to-work employer incentive fund is an innovative example of an incentive-based employer engagement effort. At both the state and local level, portions of the state school-to-work implementation grant will be set aside to create an incentive pool. These funds will be made available to intermediary organizations, including industry-specific consortia of employers, trade associations, and labor organizations, through a competitive process. Allowable uses of the funds include designing industry-specific work-based learning activities, integrated curricula, skill standards, and performance assessments; providing materials and equipment; and developing strategies for further employer recruitment.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THIS TOPIC, CONSULT THE FOLLOWING RESOURCES:

Effective Practices

Kalamazoo County Consortium Education for Employment Program: Irv Cumming, Assistant Superintendent, 1819 East Milham Road, Kalamazoo, MI 49002 ★ (616) 381-4620.

Kodak's 21st Century Learning Challenge: Jan Berston, Co-manager Eastman Kodak Company, 343 State Street, Rochester, NY 14650 ★ (716) 781-5081.

Maryland School-to-Work Office: Kathy Oliver, Maryland State Department of Education, 200 West Baltimore Street, Baltimore, MD 21201-2595 ★ (410) 767-0158.

Organizations

The Center for Workforce Preparation, an affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, works to build employer involvement in school-to-work with its members and in the larger business community. 1615 H Street, NW, Washington, DC 20062-2000 ★ (202) 463-5525.

Jobs For the Future has worked for 10 years on issues of workforce preparation, economic development, and education reform and has focused on how these issues can be better integrated at the state and national levels so that all citizens are prepared for lives of work and learning. JFF is collaborating with the NELC to develop employer involvement strategies. In addition, JFF has developed the National Health Employer School-to-Career Network, a group of 30 hospitals that support the expansion of school-to-work in the health industry. One Bowdoin Square, Boston, MA 02114 ★ (617) 742-5995.

National Academy Foundation (NAF) guides the start-up and implementation of career academies in high schools across America. NAF provides industry-specific school-to-work curricula to the local Academies, helps train local high school teachers to teach Academy courses, develops collaborations with local and national business partners, and provides ongoing assistance to individual Academies. 235 Park Avenue South, Seventh Floor, New York, NY 10003 ★ (212) 420-8400.

National Alliance of Business (NAB) is an independent, business-led, nonprofit corporation established in 1968 to promote partnerships among business, labor, government, and education to develop and maintain a world-class American workforce. NAB provides technical services, product innovation, and on-site program development. 1201 New York Avenue, NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20005-3917 ★ (202) 289-2888.

National Center for Education and the Economy's Workforce Skills Program is working to build a human resources investment system in the United States by helping to implement the recommendations of *America's Choice: High Skills or Low Wages!* at the national, state, and local levels. To carry out its mission, the Workforce Skills Program is working closely with leaders

in the federal and state governments and in the education and business arenas to develop public policy and to provide technical assistance to implement those policies. 700 Eleventh Street, NW, Suite 750, Washington, DC 20001 ★ (202) 783-3668.

National Employer Leadership Council (NELC) was created to provide a voice for and show the commitment of the business community on school-to-work issues. The goal of the NELC is to mobilize employers around school-to-work initiatives in collaboration with other stakeholders. The NELC is a diverse, non-partisan coalition of Chief Executive Officers committed to investment in exemplary school-to-work initiatives within their own companies and throughout the nation. 1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 310, Washington, DC 20036 ★ (202) 822-8027.

Public/Private Ventures takes a broad view of school-to-work as part of youth development. P/PV has been working for 17 years operating research demonstrations, replicating its program models, and researching youth programs. Recently, P/PV has investigated the role of intermediary organizations in school-to-work. In addition, P/PV has developed the WorkPlus Model, aimed at enriching the work experiences of young people employed in entry-level jobs within the hospitality, food service, and retail industries. P/PV provides training workshops, community-based curriculum, and information regarding the relationship between work and society. 2005 Market Street, Suite 900, Philadelphia, PA 19103 ★ (215) 557-4400.

Publications

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Wills, Joan, and Irene Lynn. *School Lessons, Work Lessons: Recruiting and Sustaining Employer Involvement in School-to-Work Programs*. Washington, DC: Institute for Educational Leadership, 1994.

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